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Atari Online News, Etc.
A-ONE Online Magazine
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~ P2Ps Given Warning! ~ People Are Talking! ~ CTLink Project!

~ New MyDoom Variant! ~ Finnish Web Addicts! ~ Spyware Is Growing!
~ Doom 3 On Shelves Now! ~ Lycos Sold to Terra! ~ Bloomba E-Mail!
~ Hospitals Move To EMR! ~ Gates Wants Nintendo?! ~ Can-Spam Is Flop!

-* CGE 2004 Celebrity Line-Up! *-
-* Mozilla Makes Preemptive Bug Strike *-
-* Online Scams Posing As Kerry Fund-Raisers! *-

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->From the Editor's Keyboard "Saying it like it is!"
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It appears that the summer season has arrived, at least for a few days anyway. Early in the week, the mercury climbed to around the 90-degree mark, and probably reached that in my area. The humidity was almost as high, relatively speaking. That's okay, we're allowed a few of these days each summer - as long as most of the season is marked with the cooler temperatures that we've seen most of this summer so far.

Most of my planned projects have been completed, so the warmer weather doesn't really bother me too much now. And, if it gets too hot or humid, I just jump in the pool to cool off. Our sunroom projects are done except for the furnishings. We got blinds, but we'll need more due to an error in calculations of the numbers needed. We're debating the next inside project, but it appears that the enclosed front porch is going to get an overhaul soon!

There's a story that's in this week's issue which is, or should be, of great interest for everyone. it's also one that affects me professionally - the eventual adaptation of electronic medical records. For me, I work in the Health Information Management field. That's "Medical Records" for the politically incorrect of us. My role in the department is managing the storage and retrieval of the physical medical record for our patients. We track their movement wherever they go. On paper, it sounds like a pretty easy task, until you factor in the volume, multiple needs for the records, doctors moving them throughout the facility and bypassing my staff, and other day-to-day issues that makes our "simple" task more challenging.

People are used to having a paper medical record. Patients expect to see a physician with his/her medical record in hand. Doctors expect the paper record to review past medical history before seeing a patient, and during an examination. Without that paper record, it makes patient care a little more difficult, especially in a facility as large as ours.

Over the years, parts of a patient's history has also been stored online. Our laboratory system has had test orders and results online for a number of years. In years past, we used to send records to the physician whenever test results were placed into the record, for review. This process required a lot of manpower and the numbers of records moving throughout the facility was massive. We finally convinced the powers that be that since the results were available online, it made no sense to send the paper record; the ordering physician could look those results up online. Not to mention that a paper copy of the results continued to be directed to the physician!

As technology grows, more and more emphasis has been directed to provide the ability to place more information online. Instead of writing down notes in the record, a physician can dictate his/her notes, and have them uploaded to the system and be made available. These notes can also be electronically signed, thus validating the accuracy/completeness of the note. Radiology has developed an electronic system which will eventually make the x-ray film obsolete. Instead of having to review a film or paper interpretation, that information can be viewed online. And the story continues with other tests, and documentation. The downside: we still maintain the paper copies of all of this information. And, there are doctors still who will maintain that the paper record is vital.

But this is only part of the story. I agree that technology is important to healthcare. And timeliness is important. As a patient, would you want to have to come into an emergency room with chest pains, and have to wait to be seen until your paper medical record arrives into the exam room? Not me. I know the volume that we deal with every day. I know the difficulties we encounter trying to locate medical records. I know the time it takes for it to leave our department and get delivered to a patient care area. Why have to wait if all of your vital medical history is available on a computer? And, your electronic history will be complete - the paper record may be so active that the paper results and notes may be sitting somewhere waiting for someone to insert them into the record.

Okay, so now we know that an electronic medical record is the wave of the future. But, we're now faced with other issues - most importantly, privacy and confidentiality. With the paper record, the majority of people touching your record are healthcare staff. We've all signed confidentiality statements. This means that the only time that anyone views your record is supposed to be because it's part of our job. If my neighbor's record crosses my path for some reason, unless it's my job to do something with that record, I'm required (by law) to suppress my curiosity as to why he/she is being seen, and do what I need to do and send it on. And if my job requires me to do something with the information inside that record, I keep the information confidential. And that goes for any patient - whether it be a friend, relative, or whomever.

So, what about an electronic record. Now it becomes more difficult. We know that computers can be hacked. If information is stored on the web, it can be hacked. Security is even more important for something like medical histories that are stored electronically, both internally and externally. So, not only do medical facilities have to put all of that medical history in a fashion that ties it all together for each patient so a physician can access it easily; but it also has to do so in fashion to keep people from accessing that information when they're not supposed to have that access.

Yes, technology is the way to go for the future of medical information. But with those immense improvements comes a greater responsibility to keep that information secure and private. To me, that's a terrific challenge.

Until next time...

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www.czuba-tech.com

CTLink will be finished if at least 100 orders arrive.

For Falcon 030, the schematics are finished and the routing stills to be done. Same for the VME version for MSTE, TT & Hades.

This project was started in April 04 and Nature informed me that they finished an Ethernet board for CT60. Now they have added the same USB controller than on CTLink, and CTLink is using the same Ethernet controller than the EtherNAT board. This will gain time for drivers for the two boards : Ethernet is managed by Nature and USB by Jan Thomas

Now you have the ball!
Let me know if you may buy this product ....
The more you will be, the faster will be finished the project...
I will record you up to september (because of your holidays).

Thanks to all people that support the atari projects.

Regards

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PEOPLE ARE TALKING
compiled by Joe Mirando
joe@atarinews.org

Hidi ho friends and neighbors. Another week has flown by, and we're now into August already. It amazes me how fast time can fly. You know the saying; "Time flies when you're having fun"?

Well, it appears that time flies not only when you're having fun, but also when you're too busy to pay attention to it. This is the end of the 32nd week of the year, and I haven't really paid attention to more than a handful of them.

On another note, my doctor has decided that physical therapy wasn't doing enough for the herniated disc in my neck. So now, instead of going to a physical therapist, I'm going to a chiropractor. Chiropracty is one of those things that either you believe in or you don't. I do. I don't think it's a cure for everything, but I believe that it has many applications. We shall see.

Of course, since the chiropractor is just starting off on my neck, I'm sore from the middle of my neck down to the middle of my shoulder blade on one side. I feel like I've been beaten with a baseball bat.

Well, enough about me. The message traffic has picked up a little bit in the newsgroup, so let's take a look at what's going on.

From the comp.sys.atari.st NewsGroup
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RenØ Kint asks about a Secure Shell application:

"I am in the process of re-installing my Atari stuff. I found my good old 1040STfm dead, but the MegaSTe2 is still there, and running (although it has a keyboard with some problems.

The 'new' setup is mainly there for few reasons: the geek part (it runs!), maybe some programming (I still have Pure C around here somewhere), but also as a simple SSH client once I got it connected to some ethernet adapter. It starts up quickly compared to my Windows and Linux PCs or my iMac!

So I need an ethernet adapter (hopefully, Elmar Hilgart will send me one soon), and an SSH client, as my Linux server only accepts secure connections.

But, I don't think I have found an SSH client till now.....maybe it is part of STiNG, but I highly doubt it. If it doesn't exist....well, I will have to fire up Pure C, dive into STiNG API's and SSH protocol descriptions, dig up my old C knowledge and start typing...:-).

Can anyone help me? Is there an SSH client already? If not, is someone out there willing/able to help out? I have not programmed anything serious since 1993, so i definitely could use any help."

Matthias Alles tells RenØ:

"You should give MiNT a try.

http://sparemint.atariforge.net/sparemint/

Sparemint is a MiNT-distribution, based on RPMs. This is the package-list:
http://sparemint.atariforge.net/sparemint/html/packages.html
A ssh-client is also available, but I doubt it will work with a 2MB machine (maybe with 4MB?). Beside that ssh is terribly slow on original Atari-machine. You can take a nap, when you are logging in with ssh...

I don't know of any other ssh-client, but this one (openSSH)."

RenØ replies:

"I remember running a very early version of MiNT on my STFm (which had 3MB of memory ;-)), so I know a version of MiNT existed that ran on an original ST.

Maybe I will be able to run a crippled SpareMiNT installation, enabling me to use some nice features (like filesharing through samba), but I think the 2 MB boundary will restrict me a *lot*. However, I can not do much about that, can I? Is there a *simple* way to expand my MegaSTe to 4 MB or even higher? Then I would try that as well.

I know OpenSSH from my Linux machines as well as my MacOSX machine. The version you linked to is compiled with the 68020 as a target CPU, so at

least I will have to recompile it after installing SpareMiNT.

Well, at least this will not be a very easy exercise, that’s for sure....my God, a lot has changed since I pulled the plug on my ST’s....

Sure, the handshake procedure of SSH takes some CPU time, but once logged in I have good hopes the Atari can keep up with encrypting/decrypting the traffic....?"

Frank Naumann adds:

"I’m sure you won’t like to run ssh without FPU support. It require 3-4 minutes to establish a ssh connection on an ATARI TT. It will take ages without FPU on an 8 MHz ATARI ST."

Thomas Binder tells Frank:

"That only applies to SSHv2 - v1-connections (ssh -1) are quite a lot faster, but unfortunately also not fully secure due to some flaws in the protocol. Of course, it’s still better than using telnet / rsh ..."

Mark Duckworth tells RenØ:

"The current desires of a unix system require a little bit more ram though. In your case you’re looking at Freemint, straight to an AES with networking. That’s it. And even then you’ll have (slightly) less free ram available than after booting up a well configured MagiC installation. MagiC is cream of the crop on ST/STe machines, that’s for sure.

Unlike some of the older Atari’s, the Mega STe has 4 SIMM slots. Just go out to your computer store (preferably one that deals in old used parts) and find 4 30 pin simms. eBay is a great place to find these 2. You’re looking at about $1 for 4 megs... Seriously. They click into the slots on the board - very intuitive.

Unfortunately an ST is[n’t] a play machine anymore, unless you have MagiC on it. Even then it’s only moderately functional on today’s internet - A falcon with a CT60 however is a pretty strong animal. I have ftp, sftp, ssh (client and server), irc, a great web browser (http://highwire.atari-users.net), and due to our fantastic kernel maintainers, freemint is solid and has very predictable behavior.

Also keep in mind, each openssh process requires something like 1.5 megs or more of ram. An ST, even with 4mb this could be impossible. best to telnet to another machine on the network and ssh from there - it’s tough to accept a machine’s limitations.

There exists boards to upgrade a mega ste to 8 megs or more, but I have been unable to procure one of these and I’m really good at finding that type of thing I wish there was more out there, like the Marpet boards for normal St’s."

RenØ now posts:

"First, thanks for all the positive responses to my original SSH question. The original questions has led to some spin-off now.

I opened the case and (hey, I was used to an 1040 STf!!) I was surprised by the components and modularity of this Mega STE compared to what I was used to on the 1040 back in 1986. And it is 'old-pink' inside

First: it seems to have a quite standard FDD, although this one has a DD drive (720K). Is it possible to replace it with an ordinary 1.44 floppy drive from an ordinary PC? I have one here for spare parts....does anyone know if this can be done easily?

Second: the same for the HD. It is a 48MB HDD and it looks like we have an adapter built-in? Is this an ordinary SCSI drive Atari built in? If this is the case, my hands are itching to replace it with some multi-100MB SCSI drive of more recent build.....can this be done?

Third: The memory (as already told) is in 2 SIMMs. However, the SIMMs yield no specs to me. Can someone tell me what SIMMs I exactly need to make this a 4MB machine from the 2MB already there?

Fourth: There is a slot for a 68881 or 68882 FPU. Which should I use? Would it make any difference (for example in our SSH case...)?

Fifth: The OS: Is a MegaSTE with 4MB OK for the hailed MagiC? Or FreeMiNT? I have read about these on the net, but can someone please tell me about which one to use in what case?

Sixth: heeee, maybe (after 18 years!!) I am still a geek for wanting to get this machine on its feet again

It's summer now, guys. But this looks like a nice project for any season :-)))

Your help and contributions are very much appreciated. I used to be a very experienced user of my STF back in 86 (until about '92), but it seems I have to catch up after all these years. Mac OSX and Linux give me a lot of computing fun, but the roots are still back there...."

Coda tells Rene:

"There're two versions of MegaSTe around. The early one has an older style AJAX floppy controller and it is not compatible with 1.44mb, plus there is a GAL chip that needs replacing on the board. Later versions have the right AJAX chip AND GAL, and just need the 1.44mb mechanism. Getting hold of a new AJAX and GAL isn't that hard, its just EXPENSIVE! You can always do an 'STfm' style mod, which involves overclocking the AJAX to get the higher track density. Have a snoop around on Best Electronics at the part numbers for the AJAX and GAL and compare to what you have inside your case.

The MegaSTe SCSI card is rather weak. You can put a _single_ SCSI drive on there upto _1GB_ physical size, and nothing bigger. The card does not support Parity either, but this can be added by yourself with a little know-how and a few parts. I have heard that some people managed to put 2 drives on that card. I wouldn't try it unless you have a spare SCSI card and don't mind blowing one of them. Also, you must keep the SCSI cable as short as possible.

On my 16mhz Falcon I wouldn't really want to use either as a TOS

replacement, too darn slow. Now I have a CT60 I don’t care (except I don’t run that MagiC crap). I have not tried running either on my MegaSTe, I am happy with TOS 2.06 as I mostly use it for Music and playing ST games."

RenØ steps up to the plate again and asks:

"As long as I am the only one in the world in need of hardware answers I keep on posting and I hope you all lurking will keep the answers coming

I have checked the internals of my MegaSTE (which has a 720KB floppy drive). It has the C302096-001A AJAX chip fitted under the SCSI adapter, and the GAL is the C3019301-002, right beneath the power supply.

The AJAX chip is good. But the GAL chip I don’t know. Is it the right one?

Now: how to move on? Can I just plug in a HD floppy drive? I guess not: on the net I read about ’detect pin’ problems and even one note about having to plug the drive upside down (so the cable will have to be cut because the plug doesn’t allow for upside-down fitting of course). But others say they have been successful."

’Tim’ tells RenØ:

"I have a TT030 and replaced my 720k drive recently with a Epson SMD-300 (340) 1.44m drive, which is a direct drop in replacement, I set it to DS0 and all was good. Works perfectly, no problems at all. I believe the MegaSTE is the same as the TT."

RenØ asks Tim:

"Do you mean that as a drop-in replacement you didn’t even have to change the bezel?

Is this Epson a common model? Or will I have to shop around much for used ones?

I have a Samsung here that I took out of an old PC, it has solder pads for DS0 and DS1, so I will have to heat up the iron after more than 10 years again and start poking!

I tried it as DS1 but the MegaSTE did not respond to it at all. Not even as drive B."

Tim replies:

"Yes you do not need to change the case! Fits perfectly!!! All I have to do is swap the plastic face and eject button, and it fit perfectly.

These drives are fairly common in late 90’s PCs here in the USA. I actually have a spare. It is actually the EXACT same drive that the Falcon030 uses.

Face and everything. But for the TT/MegaSTE the face needs to be swapped from your 720k drive."

Well folks, that’s it for this time around. I’m going to go rest my achin’ neck and relax a bit. My advice to you is to do the same. Tune in again next week, same time, same station, and be ready to listen to what they are saying when...

PEOPLE ARE TALKING

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->In This Week’s Gaming Section - Doom 3 Hits the Streets!
Microsoft Looking at Nintendo?
CG Expo 2004 Celebrities!

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->A-ONE’s Game Console Industry News - The Latest Gaming News!

Much-Anticipated Doom 3 Finally Complete

Four years after setting out to remake one of the most popular and violent video games ever, the crew at id Software, Inc. is finally done with its latest vision of hell.

"Doom 3" hits store shelves Tuesday, though there were reports of some retailers breaking a midnight sales embargo and of pirated copies already being distributed for free on the Internet.

"We’re a bit nervous. It’s like raising a child and you send them out into the world," said Tim Willits, one of the game’s designers.

The $55 sequel typifies the first person shooter genre id pioneered in the early 1990s with the original "Doom," "Quake" and "Wolfenstein 3D": gamers run and gun through hordes of monsters or other enemies in three dimensions.

With each release, the visuals, sound and other effects have improved. "Doom 3" is by far the most realistic and looks nearly equal to animated films like "Shrek 2."

Marty Stratton, part of the id crew, has already blasted dozens of flame-tossing imps, flying skulls and other nightmarish demons from another dimension. But more keep spawning in flashes of yellow light.

"This is where it really starts getting scary," he says upon entering a new

level of "Doom 3" where massive hell knights lob deadly balls of energy against a backdrop of shimmering lava pools and torches made of corpses. "I don’t know how many times I’ve been through hell but it just freaks me out."

In "Doom 3" you are a marine on a martian outpost that becomes a gateway to hell after a series of top secret experiments involving ancient alien artifacts. With shotguns, rocket launchers, lasers and grenades, you alone must fend off a menagerie of beasts and possessed base workers.

It’s a familiar formula that’s served the tiny developer well. While some have decried id’s games as overly violent, the company has sold millions of copies of one gory hit after another.

In turn, the games have spawned legions of loyal fans. By the thousands, gamers of all ages flock to "QuakeCon," an annual Texas gathering paid for by id where like-minded players meet and fight each other online.

Along with "Half-Life 2," "Doom 3" is one of the most anticipated games this year, said Greg Kasavin, executive editor of the review Web site GameSpot.com.

"It represents the next technological leap by id Software - a developer that’s remained on the forefront of computer graphics and computer game technology for more than a decade," he said.

Analyst Michael Goodman with the Yankee Group said "Doom 3" could boost the sagging market for personal computer games. Sales of CD-ROM-based PC games dropped from $1.4 billion two years ago to an estimated $1 billion this year, largely due to the growing popularity of consoles like the Xbox and PlayStation 2, he said.

The success has turned co-owner and technical director John Carmack into one of the game industry’s most revered gurus, renowned for his skill at creating game "engines," the underlying foundation of a game which makes everything from graphics to sound possible.

Carmack said there was some internal debate about what the next project would be after its last game, the online shooter "Quake 3" and the "Team Arena" expansion pack in 2000.

Eventually they decided to remake Doom using new software tools created by Carmack.

"We’ve always been a small company of prima donnas," Carmack, sporting baggy shorts and a white T-shirt, said as he swiveled his bespectacled gaze from a flat screen computer monitor glowing with lines of computer code. "But we’ve really matured as a development team. Lots of things took longer than we expected, but we’re really pleased with how it all turned out."

Id’s sleek offices in a nondescript professional building in suburban Dallas have been a home away from home for its two dozen employees.

Led by Carmack, they’ve been in "crunch mode" since January, clocking 80-hour work weeks in a rush to wrap things up.

Dress is casual: Employees stroll the dim hallways wearing shorts and T-shirts. There’s a kitchen stacked with boxes of Krispy-Kreme doughnuts, bags of beef jerky and a row of arcade machines.

Many workers said an obsessive streak got them through the long hours. Lead artist Kenneth Scott said he was worn out after working 9 a.m. to 2 a.m. for months on end, but admitted to suffering from a bit of postpartum depression when it was finished.

"We're pretty up to our chins in what we do," he said. "You get used to that groove. Your mind drifts and you feel guilty when you're sitting down relaxing."

It's only been a few weeks since "Doom 3" was declared done. Already, the office is abuzz with renewed activity.

With window blinds pulled, programmers and artists are again hunched over their keyboards, working on an Xbox version of "Doom 3," as well as a new game. All anyone will say for now is that it will be a completely new game, not a sequel.

"We're not like a rock band where you take four months off," Stratton said. "Although, that would be nice."

Another Carmack project, meanwhile, has nothing to do with computer games. Between his time finishing up the game and developing rockets with his Armadillo Aerospace company, he and his wife, Anna, are expecting their first child, Christopher Ryan Carmack, in mid-August.

Microsoft's Nintendo Ambition

Since launching the Xbox , Microsoft has purchased some notable developers and had serious talks to buy several others. Now it might have its eyes on a larger prize.

Founder and chairman Bill Gates has expressed interest in buying game giant Nintendo should the company put itself on the market, reports German magazine Wirtschafts Woche.

"If Hiroshi Yamauchi calls, he will be directly transferred to me," the magazine quotes Gates as saying at an unspecified analyst conference. Yamauchi is the former president of Nintendo and still owns a stake in the company.

The magazine goes on to paraphrase Gates as saying he would immediately make an offer if Nintendo shows a readiness to sell itself.

It's a juicy headline - and I have no doubt that it's true. Given the opportunity, Microsoft would not just jump at the chance to own the company that created Mario, Zelda and Donkey Kong, it would leap, frothing at the mouth and sinking its teeth into anything that got in its way. You'd see Gates and Chief Xbox officer Robbie Bach doing a dance that would put CEO Steve Balmer's infamous "dance monkey boy" boogie to shame.

Here's the thing, though. Nintendo's not real interested in selling itself.

"It would be a great investment," said Perrin Kaplan, vice president of marketing and corporate affairs for Nintendo. "We're a very successful company. But the bad news for Mr. Gates is we're not for sale."

Analysts laughed - literally - when told about the report.

"All I know is since Microsoft announced it was getting in the gaming business, there have been rumors, but I just can’t imagine Nintendo selling," said Mike Wallace of UBS Securities.

A Microsoft spokesperson would only say ""Microsoft does not comment on rumors or speculation."

Perhaps a better game of "who’s buying who in the game industry today" can be played with Eidos. The company that Lara Croft built is most definitely on the market these days - and confirmed earlier this week that it is in talks with several companies about a possible takeover.

Things are preliminary and may go nowhere. And Eidos won’t be making further comment - but analysts have a couple of guesses about who’s at the table. The chief contenders are UbiSoft, Electronic Arts and Activision.

Eidos is a pretty juicy target, with a number of well-known franchises in its collection. The best known is the "Tomb Raider" line, which arguably has been overexposed in recent years, but could be revived if done right. Less successful franchises, such as "Deus Ex," "Legacy of Kain" and "Hitman" still have loyal cult followings.

EA has been in a buying mood lately, last week purchasing Criterion, the developer of the "Burnout" racing games and (more importantly) the creators of Renderware, perhaps the most popular third-party game engine in the industry, for $48 million.

"It gives [EA] a key franchise in ’Tomb Raider’," said P.J. McNealy, an analyst with American Technology Research. "[Other games] ’Hitman’ and ’Thief’ are in a genre in which they don’t compete right now."

UbiSoft is on the rise these days, riding a critical and commercial wave of successful titles, including "Prince of Persia" and "Splinter Cell". Buying Eidos would add to its core strengths.

Activision has seen its share prices rise over the past year on the strength of the "Spider Man 2" game, "Call of Duty" and "Tony Hawk Underground". Adding a collection of solid franchises to that mix would poise it for future growth.

Let’s not leave Microsoft out of the running, though. After all, Lara Croft isn’t the force of nature she once was, but she’d still be a strong addition to the line up of games for the next generation of Xbox. And many of Eidos’ titles appeal to a core gaming audience, which Microsoft has targeted with its console.

It may not be Nintendo, but if Bill & Co. are looking to expand Microsoft’s game development unit, they could do a lot worse.

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Classic Gaming Expo Announces Video Gaming Celebrities For 2004 Show

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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CLASSIC GAMING EXPO ANNOUNCES LARGEST GATHERING OF EARLY VIDEO GAME INDUSTRY CELEBRITIES IN THE SEVEN YEAR HISTORY OF THE SHOW

Over 50 Of Video Gaming's Brightest Stars Will Meet Fans And Share Stories At August 21 & 22 Show In San Jose, California

VALLEY STREAM, NEW YORK - August 4, 2004 - It will very likely look like a wild class reunion as over 50 of the people who helped lay the foundation for the multi-billion-dollar video game industry gather at the seventh-annual Classic Gaming Expo (CGE). These gaming pioneers will meet their fans, greet former colleagues and share their experiences from the earliest days of video gaming. Included in the stellar lineup are Steve Wozniak, co-founder of Apple Computers; David Crane, Allan Miller and Bob Whitehead, three of the four founding game designers of Activision; Al Alcorn, designer of Atari's Pong; Jay Smith, designer of the only vector-graphics game console, Vectrex; and many more. It is believed that the August 21 & 22, 2004 show at the San Jose McEnery Convention Center will mark the largest single gathering of video game industry founders at a fan event ever.

"We are deeply touched by the outpouring of support for Classic Gaming Expo from the people who started it all," said John Hardie, co-founder of CGE Services Corporation. "I and my fellow organizers, Sean Kelly and Joe Santulli, never dreamed that such a gathering would be possible, but the people who had the foresight to imagine a new form of entertainment and make it a reality have also shown they are willing to look back and preserve the history they made and share it with the fans that so admire their work."

In the history of Classic Gaming Expo many of the most respected names in video gaming history have attended the show and given keynote speeches on their roles in the history of video gaming. Ralph Baer, father of TV video games, has attended multiple times. Nolan Bushnell, founder of the first all-video-game company, Atari, made an appearance at CGE in 2003. Activision's numerous game designers from the first half of the 1980s have also been regular attendees and supporters of CGE. The list of celebrity attendees reads like a who's who of the early years of the video game industry. For a full list of the video gaming celebrities attending CGE 2004 visit the CGE celebrities Web page at: http://cgexpo.com/guests.htm

Classic Gaming Expo 2004 will take place at the San Jose McEnery Convention Center in San Jose, California, August 21 and 22, 2004 and is open to anyone with a love of video games. Additional information on attending the show can be found at CGE's Web site: www.cgexpo.com.

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A-ONE’s Headline News
The Latest in Computer Technology News
Compiled by: Dana P. Jacobson

Bloomba E-Mail Program to Include Scheduling

Bloomba, an e-mail program challenging Microsoft Corp.’s Outlook, will be upgraded with features such as scheduling as it aims to capture more business users, Stata Laboratories Inc., the program’s developer, said on Monday.

Bloomba has earned a following with search capabilities that allow users to quickly sift through e-mails and attachments with keywords.

The new version, Bloomba Professional Edition, will allow users to create and share schedules and synchronize data with Palm Inc.-based handheld devices.

Schedules can also be shared among Bloomba users without complex server-based e-mail systems, the company said.

Such features will make Bloomba, which costs $90, more appealing to small- and medium-sized businesses, said Raymie Stata, chief executive of Stata Laboratories.

Bloomba’s main competitor Outlook is used by hundred of millions of users. Smaller software developers have built add-ons to Outlook that users get by default with the program.

Last month, Microsoft bought an add-on called Lookout that allows users to search e-mail, contacts and other information with keywords.

Google Inc. also offers an online searchable e-mail account called Gmail.

Can-Spam Isn’t Doing The Job

Compliance with the Can-Spam Act has fallen to a new low, according to recent data collected by MX Logic. In July, compliance fell for the first time to less than 1% - dropping to a measly 0.54% of all unsolicited commercial mail the company sampled during the month.

MX Logic has been tracking compliance with Can-Spam since the federal law went into effect in January. Through April, MX Logic’s numbers remained stable, with about 3% of spam messages complying with the law’s requirements, which range from verifiable return addresses to measures consumers and businesses can use to opt out of mailing lists. In May and June, however, the number slipped to 1%.

"Now it’s been halved," said Steve Ruskin, a senior analyst at MX Logic. "No one’s really sure what’s going on, but it’s clear that Can-Spam isn’t a threat to spammers. They’re just ignoring it."

Although hard-core spammers - the relatively small number who account for the bulk of the world's spam - were never likely to toe the line, said Ruskin, it's possible that some spammers who were complying have stopped.

The blame, he said, could be laid on law enforcement, which hasn't been successful in tracking down on spammers. Some individuals have been stymied - most recently a Boca Raton, Fla., resident whose assets were frozen by the courts - but enforcement is the exception rather than the rule.

A contributor to the poor showing could be due to the ever-expanding numbers of spammers. "It's possible that the same number are complying now as in January," said Ruskin, "but that as the number of spammers continues to grow, that percentage gets watered down."

One of the tools businesses and users are hoping to put into play against spam is a sender authentication standard that would prevent spammers from spoofing, or forging, addresses.

This week, the standards-setting Internet Engineering Task Force is holding meetings to decide, among a raft of other issues, Sender ID, a scheme that combines Microsoft's proprietary Caller ID for Email idea and Sender Policy Framework, an extension of the SMTP protocol.

Sender ID and its rivals, such as Yahoo's DomainKeys, aim to slow down spam by verifying sender addresses, which would prevent spammers from hiding behind bogus addresses. If they have to use legitimate domains - and buy their own - spammers would be easier to track.

"We'd like to see some sort of authentication standard go forward," said Ruskin. "Like everything else, it's not a silver bullet but it could go a long way toward defeating spam."

The ITEF working group responsible for evaluating Sender ID is expected to nominate it as an Internet standard this week.

"We're giving it a pretty good chance of passing," said Ruskin, who has a company representative at the IETF meetings. "The word on the street is that everyone wants to support [Sender ID], but that some are concerned about the proprietary licensing that Microsoft wants to put in it. If someone has to fax Microsoft each time a change is proposed to the standard, that doesn't go down well with a certain group of people."

Sender ID, or at least a critical mass of some sort of authentication standard, can't come too soon for Ruskin.

During July, MX Logic's monitoring found that 84% of all E-mail outside corporate networks was spam, another new record.

With the spam-to-not-spam ratio just 50% only a year ago, Ruskin wonders where spam will stop. "Sometime next year, spam will hit the 90s," he said. "You'd like to think that there's some natural equilibrium, but unless there's a fundamental change to the framework of E-mail, we run the risk that virtually all mail will be spam."

Mozilla Launches Pre-emptive Strike on Bugs

Mozilla Foundation is hot on the tracks of intruders before they show up. The organization, which develops and distributes the open-source Mozilla browser, has formed its Security Bug Bounty Program in an effort to identify vulnerabilities before hackers have a chance to exploit them.

The Foundation is offering a US$500 reward to users who detect and report security problems in Mozilla's software. The project has the support of Linspire, formerly Lindows, which just realized a $20 million cash award from Microsoft in a settlement over the Windows trademark. Entrepreneur Mark Shuttleworth - who founded the transaction firm Thawte and later sold it to VeriSign - is also a supporter.

Security experts say that high-profile vulnerabilities, especially in Microsoft's Internet Explorer, have placed security on the front burner for most enterprises and consumers. Microsoft's Windows - which includes the Explorer browser by default (remember the antitrust rulings?) - occupies more than 95 percent of the world's personal computers.

Other systems - like Linux and Unix, or the browser developed by Mozilla - do not sustain the intense attention from hackers the way Microsoft's products do. But that may change.

Mozilla does not see itself remaining as the domain of Internet geeks. The Mozilla Foundation's president Mitchell Baker says the organization's technologies - especially the newest Firefox browser and Thunderbird e-mail client - are gaining momentum in the enterprise market. Industry experts say Mozilla has done a good job with the Netscape technology it inherited in 2003.

Mozilla anticipates getting more attention - not only from businesses, but also from hackers. "But I don't think it's valuable to simply say that increased market share means greater vulnerability," said Chris Hoffman, Mozilla's director of engineering. "There are other factors involved, and we think the starting point for Mozilla is stronger than Explorer."

Apache, which dominates on servers, has fewer security problems than Microsoft's ISS, Hoffman pointed out. The key is open source. "Microsoft has created a much more complex security environment around its software," he told NewsFactor. "When it comes to security, Mozilla should follow in the same footsteps as Apache."

In essence, Mozilla's Security Bug Bounty Program galvanizes the thousands of users who already are keeping their eyes open for security weaknesses. If security issues remain a high concern for businesses in the coming years, Mozilla could find itself grabbing a significant market share after it releases its much-anticipated Firefox 1.0 browser. No release date has been set.

New MyDoom Variant Uses Yahoo People Search

Another new version of MyDoom is worming its way through the Internet, and this variant-like the last one-uses Yahoo as part of its infection routine.

MyDoom.P is similar to most of the other MyDoom variants in that it arrives via e-mail, with a spoofed sending address and a subject line designed to make it look like the message is related to one that the recipient sent.

Among the subject lines in the e-mails are "SN: New secure mail," "Secure delivery," "Re: Extended mail," "Delivery Status (Secure)," "Re: Server Reply" and "SN: Server Status."

The body of the e-mail contains any of a number of sentences, some of which refer to the included Zip file. Many of the messages reference security or refer to the attached file as a "secure Zip file."

Once opened, the executable file copies itself to the Windows system directory as "winlibs.exe." The executable contains a list of dozens of common first and surnames that it puts through Yahoo's People Search in an attempt to find more e-mail addresses to mail itself to, according to a preliminary analysis of the worm done by the staff of the Internet Storm Center at The SANS Institute in Bethesda, Md.

MyDoom.O, released last week, used a similar ploy, plugging domain names into Yahoo, Google, AltaVista and Lycos search engines in an effort to find valid e-mail addresses. This caused severe slowdowns and periodic outages at several of the affected sites. As of midafternoon Tuesday, Yahoo's People Search appeared to be responding normally.

Researchers on Monday discovered a new version of the Gaobot worm, which spreads through the back doors installed by MyDoom variants, among other avenues of infection. Gaobot.BAJ connects to an IRC server on port 6667 and waits for instructions from the attacker.

It then begins scanning the local network for machines sharing resources with the infected PC and tries to copy itself to those machines. Afterward, it begins scanning for PCs infected with any of the MyDoom worms and attempts to install itself through the back door these worms place on infected computers.

Spyware Continues To Proliferate

Spyware continues to plague computer users, according to figures released Wednesday by Internet provider EarthLink and anti-adware vendor Webroot.

The companies' third joint SpyAudit report noted that although the incidence of spyware's most dangerous forms - systems monitors such as key loggers and trojans that can open the machine to hacker hijacking - dipped slightly from May to June, they nearly doubled from the first to the second quarters of 2004.

In the first quarter, SpyAudit found some 253,000 pieces of spyware it categorized as system monitors or trojans, while during the second quarter the number jumped to approximately 447,000.

So far this year, the pair have scanned approximately 2.1 million systems and detected an astounding 54.8 million pieces of spyware and adware. The average number of such programs on each PC is 26.5 - a number that's remained fairly stable since the first of the year when the companies began their scans.

Adware, defined by Webroot as any advertising-supported program that can put pop-ups, pop-unders, and banners on the screen, remains the dominant form of we-don't-want-it-ware, said the companies. Adware and adware software's cookies account for 98.8% of all the detected spyware.

"The increased prevalence of adware is concerning," said David Moll, Webroot's CEO. "Consumers should know that not all adware is harmless or benign. Some of the most notorious programs in the spyware family are classified as adware."

As proof, EarthLink and Webroot put the spotlight on CoolWebSearch, a particularly virulent form of adware and one of the top adware threats on the Web. Webroot has spotted and written signatures for nearly 100 CWS variations.

"CoolWebSearch is a nasty example of adware that hijacks home pages and Web searches, triggers a crippling amount of pop-ups, and changes a user's browser settings," said Moll. Its most common use is to usurp a user's browser home page and direct him or her to a paying client's site instead. Other variations add porn links to Internet Explorer's Favorites list and add a large number of files to the infected system, reducing overall browsing performance.

EarthLink provides a free spyware scanning tool on its Web site, as does Webroot.

Warnings Sent to File-Sharing Companies

Attorneys general from 45 states sent letters to seven companies that offer online file-sharing software, hinting at possible legal consequences if the networks don't better inform computer users about potential copyright violations from sharing files.

But a legal expert questioned how file sharing might break state laws.

The correspondence Thursday signals the states' willingness to go after the purveyors of Kazaa, Morpheus and other similar peer-to-peer software, which entertainment companies contend are profiting from the unauthorized distribution of songs, movies and software by users of their programs.

The letter was signed by attorneys general from all but five states - Alaska, Kansas, Nebraska, New Hampshire and Wyoming - the District of Columbia and the U.S. Virgin Islands.

The attorneys general ask the companies to improve how they inform those who use their software about potential legal and security risks associated with file-sharing, which include being sued for copyright infringement, identity theft, and unwittingly being exposed to pornography, computer viruses and spyware.

The companies are also urged to develop better filters for pornography, but not to make any changes to their software, such as adding encryption features to hide users' identity.

"Encryption only reinforces the perception that P2P technology is being used primarily for illegal ends," the letter says. "Accordingly, we would ask you to refrain from making design changes to your software that prevent law enforcement in our states from investigating and enforcing the law."

The letter stops short of spelling out consequences if the companies don't heed the requests, but it includes references to past legal action taken

by the states against suspected spammers.

It’s unclear what legal action based on state law is open to the attorneys general.

Efforts to use federal copyright laws to shutter the current crop of file-sharing software distributors have stalled since the original file-sharing network, Napster, was forced to close down in 2001.

But states can only enforce copyright violations when it applies to sound recordings made before 1972, said Fred von Lohmann, senior intellectual property attorney at the Electronic Frontier Foundation in San Francisco.

"I’m not aware of any state law that file-sharing violates," von Lohmann said. "This letter is clearly an exercise of political clout on the part of the entertainment industry."

Letters were sent to the companies behind Kazaa, Morpheus, Grokster, Bear Share, Blubster, MetaMachine/EDonkey 2000 and Lime Wire, as well as two of the so-called P2P industry’s trade associations.

Adam Eisgrau, executive director of P2P United, a trade group that represents several of the firms, questioned the jurisdiction of the attorneys general.

In a statement, Lime Wire LLC in New York said it would provide additional warnings to its users "as appropriate," but rejected the suggestion to add filters or remove encryption.

"Asking us not to use encryption is incredibly shortsighted when there are clear legitimate corporate and public uses for a private network," said Greg Bildson, Lime Wire’s chief operating officer.

Lycos Sold to Korean Portal Company

A Korean Internet company is buying Lycos Inc. and its network of Web sites for $105 million.

Terra Networks SA said on Monday that is it selling the U.S.-based portal operator to Daum Communications Corp., based in Seoul, South Korea, following a competitive process led by investment bank Lehman Brothers Inc.

As previously reported, Terra Networks earlier this year indicated that it was considering alternatives for Lycos.

Terra Networks, based in Madrid and part of telecommunications company Telef¢nica SA, had bought Lycos in 2000 for $12.5 billion, calling the combined company Terra Lycos.

Lycos’ U.S. operations are based in Waltham, Mass., and include such sites as Wired News, Tripod.com, HotBot.com and Angelfire.com.

Terra Networks said it will retain Terra Networks USA, which operates a portal for Spanish speakers in the United States, and its stake in Lycos Europe. Lycos will transfer those assets, valued at $435 million, prior to Daum’s acquisition.

In a statement, Terra Networks said the sale of the company's strategy of "strengthening its presence in geographical areas in which the Telef¢nica Group has significant operations and in the Spanish and Portuguese speaking market."

The sale of Lycos is subject to the approval of U.S. regulators.

Online Scams Pose as Kerry Campaign Fund-Raisers

Scam artists posing as fund-raisers for Democratic presidential nominee John Kerry are trying to trick Internet users into sending them money, an Internet security firm said on Tuesday.

The Kerry campaign said it had asked the Justice Department to investigate.

Two separate mass e-mail "spam" campaigns were uncovered that ask users to contribute to Kerry's presidential bid, but direct the money to Web sites in India and Texas that are not affiliated with the campaign, said the security firm SurfControl, which makes Internet content filters.

Such "phishing" scams will likely become more commonplace as the presidential campaign heats up, SurfControl vice president Susan Larson said in a news release.

"Phishers and other scam artists are masters of leveraging timely events to exploit the unwary," Larson said.

Kerry campaign spokesman Phil Singer said the campaign was aware of the situation and had asked the Justice Department to investigate.

Kerry's campaign is no longer accepting donations, after receiving the Democratic nomination last week, so any e-mail money solicitations purporting to come from the campaign would not be legitimate.

Both Kerry and President Bush, the Republican candidate, have said they will rely on public money rather than private funds after accepting their party's nominations.

A Kerry spokesman was not immediately available for comment.

Both Kerry scams were dated August 1 but the Web sites behind them were no longer operational, SurfControl said.

Online records show that one of the Web sites, www.johnkerry-edwards.org, is registered to a woman in New Braunfels, Texas. A call to the listed phone number was not immediately returned.

The other Web site, www.yahoogoogle.biz, is registered in Jaipur, India. No phone number was provided.

The official Kerry Web site is www.johnkerry.com.

Phishing incidents have become increasingly common over the past year as scam artists pose as banks and online businesses in attempts to collect bank-account numbers, credit-card numbers and other sensitive personal information.

June saw 1,422 new incidents, up from 176 in January, according to the Anti-Phishing Working Group, a financial-services industry task force.

Most phishing Web sites were online for less than three days as fraud perpetrators attempted to stay one step ahead of law enforcers, the group said.

Yahoo Unveils New Local Search Engine

Internet giant Yahoo Inc. is unveiling a new search site that promises to provide a more precise guide to neighborhood businesses, making the latest in a series of attempts to improve the World Wide Web’s focus on local information.

Sunnyvale-based Yahoo is touting the site, http://local.yahoo.com, as a major leap ahead in an industrywide effort to fine tune online search engines so they do a better job finding things closer to home.

"We think this is a first product that crystallizes the power of local search," said Paul Levine, who directs Yahoo’s push into local search.

Yahoo launched the site late Monday on a test basis, meaning the company still might revise some features based on user feedback. Reflecting the experimental nature of the site, Yahoo initially isn’t linking to the local search engine from its main Web site.

The local search site represents another bit of one-upmanship in Yahoo’s intensifying rivalry with Mountain View-based Google, which introduced a similar product in March.

Several other online search engines also have been zeroing in on local search results, hoping to cash in on the lucrative small business advertising market.

Verizon Communications souped up the local search results of its SuperPages.com site earlier this year and Ask Jeeves Inc. on Tuesday planned to announce a partnership with CitySearch in a bid to improve the quality of local search results delivered on ask.com.

Hospitals Move Toward Paperless Age

Hospitals are trading their once-scattered medical charts, file folders, X-rays and other documents for a unified electronic records system accessible with a few keystrokes.

Federal officials who are trying to convince more hospital executives to go "paperless" say electronic records can make hospitals more efficient, reduce medical errors and lower health-care costs.

The costs of the transition can be high, and many physicians are also unwilling to trade the ease of jotting down paperbound notations of their patients’ statuses for a system that requires them to type the same information into a computer.

But concerns aside, digital records are a leap ahead for records system rooted in cumbersome 19th century filing systems.

With no patient chart in sight, Dr. Sheila Gamache strides into Thom Kolby’s hospital room to check on him a day after the 54-year-old arrived ashen-faced and perilously close to death with a clogged artery starving his heart of oxygen.

Rather than flipping through a clipboard thick with pages of notations and test results, Gamache gets up to speed on Kolby’s condition simply by logging onto a wireless notepad she carries on her daily rounds at the Indiana Heart Hospital.

The Indiana Heart Hospital’s year-old digital records system allows Gamache, a cardiologist, to show Kolby an X-ray movie of his beating heart just after he was admitted the day before with a clogged artery and in excruciating pain.

"Do you see that right there?" she tells Kolby gravely, pointing to the looped movie of the blockage displayed on a flat-screen computer in his room. "I’m not kidding, they have a name for these and they’re called widow-makers."

Kolby, of New Palestine, Ind., watches the digital movie quietly with his sons Tyler, 14, and Caleb, 12, then observes, "That must have been the pain I was feeling." He tells Gamache he’s feeling wonderful and is glad to be alive a day after a surgeon reopened the blocked artery by inserting a stent.

After the checkup, Gamache sits down at a computer outside Kolby’s room - one of 650 spread across the 88-bed hospital - to enter notes and order changes in his blood-thinning medication.

And all of it without the typical paper trail filled with scrawled physician handwriting.

Despite its digital records system, which cost $15 million to implement, the hospital is not fully paperless. It still generates paper so that it can interface with the majority of the medical community that remains burdened with paper-filled records rooms.

To cut that paper load and meet President Bush’s goal of making sure most Americans have computerized medical records available within 10 years, the federal government is trying to move things along.

On July 21, Health and Human Services Secretary Tommy Thompson outlined a plan that sets technology standards and provides financial incentives for doctors and hospitals to invest in health care information technology.

David J. Brailer, the national coordinator for health information technology appointed by President Bush in May, said cost has been one barrier. He said it can cost tens of millions of dollars for a large hospital, or network of hospitals, to make the change. Getting physicians, nurses and medical technicians to abandon years of routine for a new system is another obstacle.

"We don’t just automate the old systems - we change the way the work is done. And sometimes there’s resistance to change," Brailer said. Younger physicians are less apt to object.

The software must, of course, be reliable and handled with care. A new system at a Department of Veterans Affairs' hospital in Tampa, Fla., was plagued by troubles that delayed surgeries and sparked congressional probes. The VA said last week that it is scrapping that system.

Nearly all hospitals do have electronic billing, but adoption of electronic health records has been slow. Just 13 percent of hospitals and 28 percent of physicians' practices had some level of electronic health record systems in 2002, according to HHS.

Yet the change appears to carry great benefits.

According to a recent analysis by the Institute of Medicine, the routine use of electronic records could help reduce the tens of thousands of deaths and injuries caused by medical mistakes every year.

Brailer said paperless systems also cut administrative costs by eliminating the need to produce, maintain and store enormous numbers of paper files. Although it takes doctors longer to enter their patient observations on a computer instead of writing them down, he said digital records save time in the long term.

Tapping into this new data stream could advance even loftier goals.

The Mayo Clinic and IBM Corp., for example, are collaborating on a project enlisting IBM's powerful supercomputers to analyze electronic medical records and quickly assess patients' responses to new treatments for cancer or other diseases.

The project began when the partners integrated millions of patient records once stored in several incompatible formats into a standard system. Those records, when combined with data such as the vast body of information emerging from analysis of the human genome, could help doctors identify disease causes and prevention, Dr. Hugh Smith, chairman of the Mayo Clinic Board of Governors, said in a statement.

One drawback that electronic records systems pose for hospitals, however, is that they can reduce hospital revenue, Brailer said. That's because more efficient systems eliminate duplicated treatments, shorten hospital stays and get patients out of intensive care units faster.

"This is an industry that's not necessary paid on the basis of efficiency. It's paid on the basis of volume," Brailer said.

Evanston Northwestern Healthcare spent about $30 million to get its three Chicago-area hospitals switched to a full electronic records system that about 6,200 employees began using last year.

Mark R. Neaman, the company's president and chief executive office, said the goal is about $10 million in savings in the first year, largely by reducing the data-collection process.

Eliminating the time-consuming dictation and transcription process of physicians' patient observations has saved $500,000 alone so far, he said.

Neaman said turnaround times for test results have fallen significantly at the three hospitals, which have about 50,000 inpatient admissions and 100,000 emergency room visits annually. Getting mammogram results, for example, now take about a day, not days or weeks.

"If you're a patient waiting for a crucial test result, an hour can seem like a day," he said.

The Leapfrog Group, a nonprofit coalition of business and other groups, is one of several organizations working to encourage hospitals to move to computerized records systems.

Suzanne Delbanco, the Washington-based group's chief executive officer, said the biggest impetus for change may come from baby boomers who are less willing than their parents to wait around for test results demanding more efficient medical care.

"As patients begin to recognize that hospitals are largely in the dark ages, they will begin to demand that they get the best care possible, which is in part dependent on hospitals using electronic records," she said.

Web Addiction Gets Finnish Conscripts Out of Army

A number of Finnish conscripts have been excused their full term of military service because they are addicted to the Internet, the Finnish Defense Forces said on Tuesday.

Doctors have found the young men miss their computers too much to cope with their compulsory six months in the forces.

"For people who play (Internet) games all night and don't have any friends, don't have any hobbies, to come into the army is a very big shock," said Commander-Captain Jyrki Kivela at the military conscription unit.

"Some of (the conscripts) go to the doctor and say they can't stay. Sometimes, the doctors have said they have an Internet addiction," Kivela said.

There are no official figures for the Internet addict dropout rate.

"They get sent home for three years and after that they have to come back and we ask if they are OK ... they will have had time to grow up," Kivela said.

Finland called up 26,500 men in 2003, nine percent of whom were relieved of duty for medical reasons.

However, the Internet drop-outs have not dented national pride in "sisu," a Finnish quality of being tough and resilient.

"We are very proud of our Finnish men. Eight-two percent of all Finnish men manage their whole military service," Kivela said.

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